



# Amnesty International

## Orange County

GROUP 141 ORANGE • GROUP 175 LONG BEACH  
GROUP 178 IRVINE • GROUP 596 HUNTINGTON BEACH

October 2005

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

## USA: Thousands of Children Sentenced to Life without Parole

*This article is taken from an October 12, 2005 AIUSA press release.*

There are at least 2,225 child offenders serving life without parole (LWOP) sentences in U.S. prisons for crimes committed before they were age 18, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International said in a new joint report published today.

While many of the child offenders are now adults, 16 percent were between 13 and 15 years old at the time they committed their crimes. An estimated 59 percent were sentenced to life without parole for their first-ever criminal conviction. Forty-two states currently have laws allowing children to receive life without parole sentences.

The 157-page report, *The Rest of Their Lives: Life without Parole for Child Offenders in the United States*, is the first national study examining the practice of trying children as adults and sentencing them to life in adult prisons without the possibility of parole. The report is based on two years of research and on an analysis of previously uncollected federal and state corrections data. The data allowed the organizations to track state and national trends in LWOP sentencing through mid-2004 and to analyze the race, history and crimes of young offenders.

"Kids who commit serious crimes shouldn't go scot-free," said Alison Parker, Senior Researcher with Human Rights Watch, who authored the report for both organizations. "But if they are too young to vote or buy cigarettes, they are too young to spend the rest of their lives behind bars."

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are releasing *The Rest of Their Lives* at a critical time: while fewer youth are committing serious crimes such as murder, states are increasingly sentencing them to life without parole. In 1990, for example, 2,234 children were convicted of murder and 2.9 % sentenced to life without parole. By 2000, the conviction rate had dropped by nearly 55 %, yet the percentage of children receiving LWOP sentences rose by 216 % (to 9 %).

"Untie the hands of state and federal judges and prosecutors," said Dr. William F. Schulz, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA (AIUSA). "Give them options other than turning the courts into assembly lines that mass produce mandatory life without parole sentences for children, that ignore their enormous potential for change and rob them of all hopes for redemption."

In 26 states, the sentence of life without parole is mandatory for anyone who is found guilty of committing first-degree murder, regardless of age. According to the report, 93 % of youth offenders serving life without parole were convicted of murder. But Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International

found that an estimated 26 % were convicted of "felony murder," which holds that anyone involved in the commission of a serious crime during which someone is killed is also guilty of murder, even if he or she did not personally or directly cause the death.

For example, fifteen-year-old Peter A. was sentenced to life without parole for felony murder. Peter had joined two acquaintances of his older brother to commit a robbery. He was waiting outside in a van when one of the acquaintances botched the robbery and murdered two victims. Peter said, "Although I was present at the scene, I never shot or killed anyone." Nevertheless, Peter was held accountable for the double murder because it was established during the trial that he had stolen the van used to drive to the victims' house.

The human rights organizations also said that widespread and unfounded fears of adolescent "super-predators"—violent teenagers with long criminal histories who prey on society—prompted states to increasingly try children as adults. Ten states set no minimum age for sentencing children to life without parole, and there are at least six children currently serving the sentence who were age 13 when they committed their crimes. Once convicted, these children are sent to adult prisons and must live among adult gangs, sexual predators and in harsh conditions.

According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, there is no correlation between the use of the LWOP sentence and youth crime rates. There is no evidence it deters youth crime or is otherwise helpful in reducing juvenile crime rates. For example, Georgia rarely sentences children to life without parole but it has youth crime rates lower than Missouri, which imposes the sentence on child offenders far more frequently.

Nationwide, black youth receive life without parole sentences at a rate estimated to be ten times greater than that of white youth (6.6 versus 0.6). In some states the ratio is far greater: in California, for example, black youth are 22.5 times more likely to receive a life without parole sentence than white youth. In Pennsylvania, Hispanic youth are ten times more likely to receive the sentence than whites (13.2 versus 1.3).

The United States is one of only a few countries in the world that permits children to be sentenced to LWOP. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by every country in the world except the United States and Somalia, forbids this practice, and at least 132 countries have rejected the sentence

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## September Meeting Minutes

### Group #141 Orange

#### **Artists Village Tabling**

Due a last minute snafu, the group's tabling at the Santa Ana Artists Village Open House has been pushed back to Saturday, December 3. The Artists Village Open House is held on the first Saturday of each month, 7:00–10:00 PM, rain or shine. Anyone wanting to help table is welcome. We will be near the Gypsy Den on the Plaza of the Arts. It is an evening when the galleries stay open late and there are lots of people out walking. The following link shows a map of the area: <http://www.grandcentralartcenter.com/gcacPages/Maps.html>

Parking can be found in the Artists Village Parking Structure at Third Street and Broadway. Walk through the galleries and studios, see a live performance or just hang out and enjoy the music, all for free.

## September Meeting Minutes

### Group #175 Long Beach

#### **Attendees**

Matthew Danielczyk, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Pyi Maung, Jim Roberts, Naomi Steinfeld, Steve Wicke.

#### **Special Guest**

Pyi Maung, a Burmese refugee, visited our group and gave a firsthand account of growing up in Burma, fleeing the country, and his feelings about any prospects for change. Pyi (pronounced Pie) talked about the uprising/coup in 1988 in which thousands were killed without receiving much world attention (unlike the Tianamen Square protests a year later, where the government's brutality was covered by foreign journalists who witnessed it). Inspired by current events, 13-year-old Pyi joined underground groups at his school that protested the government, was ratted out by an informant student, and was taken to an "interrogation center." Pyi mentioned that it wasn't so much "interrogation" as torture that occurred there. He signed a promise not to protest anymore, and his family fled to Singapore upon his release. At a Burmese independence celebration in Singapore, Pyi yelled out an anti-government/pro-democracy phrase and was taken to the Burmese embassy. Luckily, he was somehow released and his family was able to come to the United States, where they were granted asylum.

Pyi is trying to spread the word about his suffering country and people and asking for help from other human rights organizations. He has compiled footage snuck out of Burma and made a film. Please contact either Norma or Jim from the Long Beach group if you are interested in asking Pyi to come to speak to your group or plan a Burma event (maybe showing his film?).

#### **War on Terror**

Once again we had to try to reassure poor Steve that there are indeed good, smart people in the U.S. and not everyone has lost their minds, despite what seems to be happening here. Steve's frustration comes from the information he is learning

about the "trashing of our constitution" and the defense of this erosion by our courts. Specifically, Steve was referring to a recent appellate court ruling pretty much allowing Jose Padilla to be kept in jail without due process forever (summarizing here, but not much off the mark!). Why aren't more Americans outraged? Editorializing here, perhaps this is one of the most important things we can do right now: educate our community about torture, the rule of law (or lack thereof), and the importance of human rights. Many people just accept what the government is doing in their name without questioning it. Check out the Amnesty web site for lots of resources, including a teach-in guide on torture. Meanwhile it is said that there are over 200 people on hunger strike in Guantánamo (120 are being force-fed through tubes).

#### **Letter-Writing**

The group sent letters to Burma, Uganda, and Senator Diane Feinstein (asking for an independent commission to look into allegations of torture involving U.S. forces).

## September Meeting Minutes

### Group #596 Huntington Beach

#### **Letter-Writing**

We had 18 people in attendance and we generated 42 letters and one petition on actions dealing with Syria, the Sudan, and Uganda.

#### **Culture vs. Human Rights**

We had a discussion on Culture vs. Human Rights led by Vincent Mapili and Tricia Hepner, Ph.D. There was a great discussion following which focused on Eritrea as a case study.

#### **Women of Juarez Update**

There was a recent trip by Irene Khan to Mexico with a discussion/focus on the murdered and missing Women Of Juarez. To read more, see the article at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/stopviolence/document.do?id=3126E40F850C8C8D85257058005BA3A2>.

#### **Next Month's Meeting**

Because our next regular meeting date is October 31, which is also Halloween, we will be switching our meeting to Monday, October 24. Our guest speaker will be Amnesty board member Ali Azizi. He recently returned from interviewing two Yemeni prisoners who were held in secret underground detention by the U.S. government for over 18 months. He will be discussing his research mission and the larger scope of the "War on Terror." If you want to understand the fury over Amnesty International's report on the US Government and "archipelago" of prisons for use in the "War on Terror," this is a meeting you can't miss!

Ali Azizi is a currently a member of the AIUSA Board of Directors, a member of the International Committee, and a country specialist on Yemen, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. He has held numerous positions in AI, including: Local Group Coordinator, Case Coordinator, Member of the Nominations Committee, and Member of the Western Region Planning Group. Ali is originally from Iran and has been a member of Amnesty International for three decades.

## Death Penalty Program

The Orange County Chapter of California People of Faith Working Against the Death Penalty is sponsoring a film and panel discussion at the St. Joseph Center, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange, on Thursday, October 20. The program begins with refreshments at 6:30 PM, followed by a screening of the film *Redemption*, starring Jamie Fox, 7:00–8:30, and the panel 8:30–9:30.

Stanley "Tookie" Williams is one of four persons on California's death row who is awaiting the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on his final appeal, due in a few weeks. Barbara Becnel, longtime friend, advocate and co-author to Stanley Williams, will speak. Other panel guests will be announced.

Contact Jan Urban at (714) 879-7663 for more information.

## Lifetime TV presents "Human Trafficking"

Human trade, slave markets, the buying and selling of people—these are words and phrases that, to many people, echo a brutal and distant time in our past. But to the countless women, men, and children trafficked every year, these words coldly define the horror of their lives. Trafficking is a global phenomenon where victims are sexually exploited, forced into labor and subjected to abuse. Trafficking is a crime under international law that requires international cooperation to address.

Lifetime TV is premiering a two-part miniseries on Monday, October 24 and Tuesday October 25 that deals with the worldwide traffic in human beings, especially women. The program airs at 9:00 PM Pacific Time.

The movie, *Human Trafficking*, stars Mira Sorvino, Donald Sutherland, and Robert Carlyle. This is a good opportunity to organize viewing "house parties" to educate members and the public about human trafficking. More information on the subject is available online including downloads and how-to's at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/stopviolence/trafficking/>.

## Death Penalty Hits Macabre Milestone

The United States is hurtling towards its 1,000th execution, expected on December 2. At press time 986 executions have taken place since the death penalty was re-introduced in this country in 1977. Amnesty International's Program To Abolish The Death Penalty (PADP) is coordinating several activities with activists and allies to prepare for this gruesome milestone, which will likely occur either by the end of the year or in early 2006. More information will be coming soon. Contact your State Death Penalty Abolition Coordinator or the PADP to get involved or learn more by going to the AIUSA website or <http://www.1000executions.org/>.

## Putting Faith Into Action

The 2005 National Weekend of Faith in Action is scheduled for October 21–23. Amnesty International USA's National Weekend of Faith in Action on the Death Penalty is an annual project coordinated by the Program to Abolish the Death Penalty. It takes place every October and seeks to bring together two important approaches to social justice: grassroots human rights activism and faith-based community action. The NWFA is not a national conference or event; rather, it is a weekend of solidarity action organized locally by faith communities and groups across the United States.

See <http://www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction/> for a list of events and activities.

## Myanmar: Thousands Facing Forced Labor

The Myanmar military is subjecting tens of thousands of ethnic minority civilians to forced labor, beatings, land confiscation and destruction of their homes according to a new report Amnesty International issued in September.

Based on interviews with more than a hundred Burmese migrants in Thailand, AI's report details an ongoing pattern of human rights violations. These have contributed to almost one in six people in Myanmar suffering from inadequate nutrition and a third of children suffering malnourishment, according to United Nations data.

The report, *Myanmar Leaving Home*, shows how the Myanmar military are exploiting the ethnic minority civilian population by confiscating their land, stealing their crops and livestock, extorting money and seizing the population, including women and children, for forced labor.

"In the last decade, hundreds of thousands of workers from Myanmar have been forced to migrate to neighboring countries as a result of the widespread denial of their economic and political rights," said Natalie Hill, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific program.

## Life without Parole

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altogether. Thirteen other countries have laws permitting the child LWOP sentence, but, outside of the United States, there are only about 12 young offenders currently serving life sentences with no possibility of parole.

The organizations called on the United States to end the practice of sentencing child offenders to life without parole. For those already serving life sentences, immediate efforts should be made to grant them access to parole procedures.

The report is available at: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/usa/clwop/>.

If you would like to continue receiving this newsletter and supporting the work of the Orange County and Long Beach Amnesty International groups, please return this coupon to the address shown with annual dues of \$10.00. Dues cover the costs of this newsletter and of stamps used for saving lives. Your address label contains your membership expiration date. Join us!

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Please make your check payable to Amnesty International. Contributions to AI are tax-deductible. Thank you for your interest and support!

# Calendar

## October

18 Tuesday 7:00 PM

**Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting** in Classroom 3 at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/ auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around and to the back. Group #141 meets the third Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Deidre Jackson at (562) 430-7381.

19 Wednesday 7:00 PM

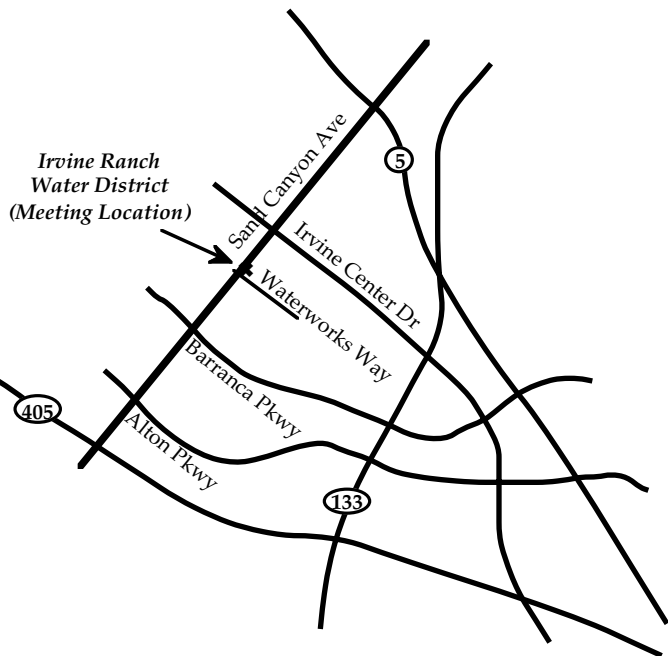
**Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting** at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rooms 1 and 2, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. For further information about the group, contact Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.

24 Monday 7:00 PM

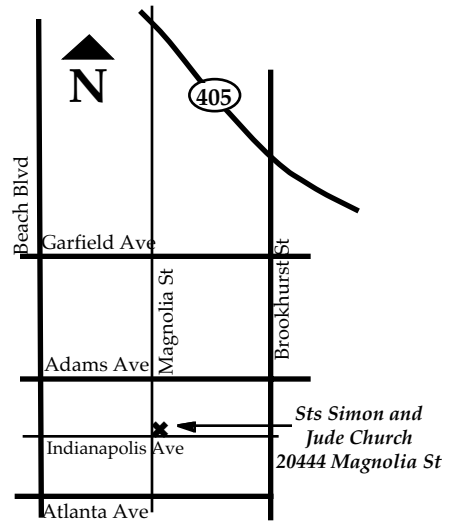
**Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting** at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. Please note the special meeting day.

25 Tuesday 7:00 PM

**Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting** at the Irvine Ranch Water District, 15600 Sand Canyon Avenue, Irvine, between the 5 and 405 freeways. See details on the web page <http://www.aiusaoc.org>. For more information about the group, contact Kris Elali at (714) 724-5811.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting Location

Amnesty International  
Group 596  
P.O. Box 5368  
Huntington Beach, CA 92615